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# AHIMSA IN SINO-INDIAN CULTURE

By

Fan Yun-Shan



The Sino-Indian Cultural Society  
Of India

Santiniketan, India  
November, 1949.

Price  
Annas Eight,

# Sino-Indian Cultural Society

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## OBJECT

"To investigate the learning of India and China, to help in the interchange of their cultures, to cultivate friendship between their peoples, and lastly to work for universal peace and human fraternity."



## PROGRAMME

"To organise Indian cultural delegations to go to China and Chinese cultural delegations to come to India for research work."

"To organise lecturing delegations to deliver lectures on Indian and Chinese cultures in both countries."

"To introduce and recommend Indian students to study in China and Chinese students to study in India."

"To establish Chinese institutions in India and Indian institutions in China for students and scholars."

"To publish books and magazines embodying the results of such investigation and researches into Indian and Chinese learning and to propagate the spirit and merit of their cultures."

## OBSERVANCE

"The activities of the Society shall be kept strictly non-political."

# AHIMSA IN SINO-INDIAN CULTURE

*By*

Prof. Tan Yun-Shan



**The Sino-Indian Cultural Society  
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## AHIMSA IN SINO-INDIAN CULTURE

If the question be asked "What is the main thing in common between India and China?" I would answer, it is our common culture. If it be further asked: "What are the chief characteristics of this common Indian and Chinese cultures?" My unhesitating answer would be, it is Ahimsa. Hence the title of this article: "Ahimsa In Sino-Indian Culture."

"Sino-Indian Culture" is a new term coined by myself about fifteen years ago. It has come into current use since the foundation of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society in both the countries, India and China, in 1934 and 1935 respectively.

Culture, in my humble opinion and to put it in a very simple way, is the cultivation of the whole of human life, and not only of the spiritual side of civilization as is usually regarded. It is the compass, as well as the pilot, of the progress of human society. It gives significance to human life and distinguishes human life from that of plants and animals. It helps man to realise at the first stage the real meaning and value of life, and ultimately to reach its real goal, in which alone there is eternal peace, love, joy, freedom and blessing. In this respect, there is not only much similarity but much identity between the culture of India and that of China. The most striking feature and analogy of these two cultures is the spirit of Ahimsa.

Ahimsa is a word negative in form but with a positive sense. Mahatma Gandhi translated it into English as "Non-violence." The ancient Chinese Buddhist scholars translated it into Chinese as "Pu-Hai" meaning "Non-Hurting." Its positive form is "Love," "Universal Love." That is "Maitri," in Sanskrit; "Jen," in Chinese. These couples

of words, Ahimsa and Maitri, or Non-Violence and Universal Love, or Pu-Hai and Jen, were born married. And they could never and would never be divorced or separated. They always carry the same message and disseminate the same gospel together. But the Chinese prefer to use the positive form rather than negative, while Indians on the other hand prefer to use the negative one. Therefore the Chinese and the Indians have also become an unseparated couple in culture.

Why was the negative word preferred by the Indians ? Gandhiji once explained this by saying :—

“All life in the flesh exists by some violence. Hence the highest religion has been defined by a negative word, Ahimsa. The world is bound in a chain of destruction. In other words, violence is an inherent necessity for life in the body. That is why a votary of Ahimsa always prays for ultimate deliverance from the bondage of the flesh.”

( *C. F. Andrews : Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas. P. 138.* )

The Chinese sage, Mencius, put it in another way. He said :—

“Men must be decided on what they will not do, and then they are able to act with vigour in what they ought to do.”

If a man wants to do things good, he must first not do things evil. So also if a man wants to love people and other beings he must first not hurt them. If a man preaches Love or Maitri or Jen but does not practise Ahimsa, or Non-violence or Pu-Hai, then his Love is no reality. It is merely a false expression or hypocrisy. Therefore almost all the great religions in the world uphold a set of precepts to govern the acts of their followers.

Ahimsa in Sino-Indian culture is not only a very prominent feature but also an ancient tradition. It is as ancient as the culture itself. Or as Gandhiji said :—

“Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills.”

( *The Harijan*. 28-2-36. )

In India, Ahimsa is one of the most cardinal virtues and doctrines of almost all the religions and philosophical sects. It had been repeatedly taught and expressly stated by the Rishis in the ancient scriptures, such as the Aitareya Brahmana, the Sataputha Brahmana, the Chandogya Upanishad, the Vamana Purana and Manu's book of Law. Therefore it was thus declared in the Mahabharata ;—

“Ahimsa is the supreme Religion.”

And Gandhiji did recite the same words on several occasions. ( C. F. Andrews : Mahatma Gandhi's Ideals. )

But the gospel of Ahimsa was first deeply and systematically expounded and properly and specially preached by the Jain Tirthankaras, most prominently by the 24th Tirthankara, the last one, Mahavira Vardhamana. Then again by Lord Buddha. And at last it was embodied in the thoughts, words and deeds and symbolized by the very life of Mahatma Gandhi.

As Ahimsa is one of the cardinal virtues and doctrines of almost all the philosophical and religious systems in India, so also it is in China. The only difference is, as mentioned above, that instead of using the negative word Ahimsa, the Chinese preferred to use the positive word Jen.

Jen has a vast volume of meanings and a lot of diversities of interpretations. Different scholars of different schools have explained it at different times. Even the greatest saint of China, Confucius, gave it a good many different explanations to different persons on different occa-

sions. Once asked by his disciple named Fan-Chieh : What about Jen ? the Master said :—

“It is to love all people.”

( *Confucian Analects.* )

At another time asked by another disciple called Yen-Yuan, about the same, he said :—

“To subdue one’s self and return to propriety ; this is Jen.”

( *Confucian Analects.* )

Again answering the same question asked by another disciple, named Chung-Kung, the Master said :—

“Do’nt do to others what you would not wish done to yourself.”

( *Confucian Analects.* )

Again at another time another disciple, called Tzu-Chang, asked the Master about the same topic, and he answered saying :—

“To be able to practice five things everywhere under heaven constitutes Jen.”

When asked what they were, the Master said :—

“Gravity, generosity, sincerity, earnestness and kindness.”

( *Confucian Analects.* )

Confucius also said on several other occasions :—

“A man of Jen will always rest in perfect virtue.”

“Only the Man of Jen can always love people.”

“A man devoted to Jen will have no hatred.”

( *Confucian Analects.* )

In Yi-Ching, the Book of Change, ( the Vedas of China ) it has been said :—

“The superior gentleman realized in the virtue of Jen will nurture people.”

“The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is life. The great jewel of the saint is his position. How to maintain his position ? It is by Jen.”

In Shu-Ching, the Book of History, it is written :—

“The people have no fixed affection, but always think of the virtuous of Jen.”

In Chung-Yung, the Doctrine of the Golden Mean, it was said thus :—

“Jen is the characteristic element of humanity and the great exercise of it is in loving all people, especially relations.”

Such passages in ancient Chinese scriptures are rather too many to be quoted one by one here. In general, Jen means Universal Love. Some European savants rendered it into English as Benevolence and Perfect Virtue. The Chinese classical scholars of Sung Dynasty also explained it as “The entire virtue of the heart.” I think the Sanskrit word Maitri as understood by Buddhist religion and philosophy is the nearest equivalent to it.

This Gospel of Jen was first properly taught and preached in China about twenty-five centuries ago by the greatest Chinese saint Confucius (551-479 B. C.). Then again it was more profoundly and systematically expounded and disseminated by the great Chinese sage Mencius (372-289 B. C.). Afterwards almost all the classical scholars of all the dynasties of China's long history cherished, promoted and propagated the same message but explained and interpreted it according to their own ways. In modern times, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the Father of the Chinese Republic had scientifically explained the lofty ideal of Jen in his San Min Chu Yi, the Three People's Principles, for his national movement of Chinese emancipation and the renaissance of Chinese culture.

Mencius was the first sage who attempted to apply this perfect doctrine to practical politics. When he first met King Hui of the Leang State, the King asked. "Venerable Sir, since you have not counted it far to come here, a distance of a thousand miles, may I presume that you are likewise provided with counsels to profit my kingdom?" He replied : "why must your Majesty use that word 'profit' ? What I am 'likewise' provided with, are counsels to Jen and Yi or benevolence and righteousness, and these are my only topics. If your Majesty say, 'what is to be done to profit my kingdom?' the great officers will say, 'what is to be done to profit our families?' and the inferior officers will say, 'what is to be done to profit our persons?' Superiors and inferiors will try to snatch this profit, the one from the other, and the kingdom will be endangered..... There never has been a man trained to Jen or benevolence who neglected his parents. There never has been a man trained to Yi or righteousness who made his sovereign an after consideration. Let your Majesty also say, Jen and Yi or benevolence and righteousness and these shall be the only themes. Why must you use that word 'profit' ?"

( *The Works of Mencius.* )

With this noble mission, Mencius went from state to state and preached to and discussed with the Kings one after another. Although none of them did actually act on his wise advice and made real avail of his presence, he had left behind an inextinguishable spirit of love, mercy and benevolence in the Chinese polity through all the long centuries. A few passages from his exhortations to the heads of the different states and his discourses with his disciples will illustrate a little more his lofty ideals.

"The man of Jen has no enemy."

"Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated."

"The carrying out of his kindly heart by a prince will suffice for the love and protection of all within the four seas, and if he does not carry it out, he will not be able to protect his wife and children."

"Jen or benevolence is the most honourable dignity conferred by Heaven and the quiet home in which man should dwell."

"Benevolence is the tranquil habitation of man, and righteousness is his straight path."

"The benevolent man loves others. The man of propriety shows respect to others."

"Jen or benevolence is man's heart, and Yi or righteousness is man's path."

"Benevolence subdues its opposite just as water subdues fire. Those, however, who now-a-days practice benevolence do it as if with one cup of water they could save a whole waggon-load of fuel which was on fire, and when the flames were not extinguished, were to say that water cannot subdue fire. This conduct, moreover, greatly encourages those who are not benevolent."

( *Above : The Works of Mencius.* )

Lao-Tsu, another of the greatest saints of China, elder than Confucius, was perhaps the only Chinese sage who



preferred to use the negative rather than the positive phraseology in discourses on his principles. He would like to lay stress more on the passive side of things rather than on the active side. For instance, the Confucianists used to say : "The heart of Heaven is Benevolence and Love," but he said :—

"Heaven and Earth are not benevolent ; they treat all created things like straw dogs we use at sacrifices. The saint is not benevolent ; he looks upon the people in the same way."

( *Lao-Tzu : Tao Te Ching.* )

Again he said :—

"Tao is eternally inactive, and yet it leaves nothing undone. If kings and princes could but hold fast to this principle, all things would work out their own reformation. If, having reformed, they still desired to act, I would have them restrained by the simplicity of the nameless Tao. The simplicity of the nameless Tao brings about an absence of desire. The absence of desire gives tranquility. And thus the Empire will rectify itself."

( *Lao-Tzu : Tao Te Ching.* )

Lao-Tzu was also perhaps the first sage, not only in China but in the world at large, who openly and strongly opposed the use of violent force and weapons and condemned war. He said :—

"He who serves a ruler of men in harmony with Tao will not subdue the Empire by force of arms. Such a course is wont to bring retribution in its train."

“Where troops have been quartered, brambles and thorns spring up. In the track of great armies there must follow lean years.”

“The good man wins a victory and then stops; he will not go on to acts of violence. Winning, he boasteth not; he will not triumph; he shows no arrogance. He wins because he cannot choose; after his victory he will not be overbearing.”

“Weapons are instruments of ill omen, hateful to all creatures. Therefore he who has Tao will have nothing to do with them.”

( *Lao-Tzu : Tao Te Ching.* )

He went even so far as to say :—

“The violent and stiff-necked die not by a natural death.”

“The best soldiers are not warlike ; the best fighters do not lose their temper. The greatest conquerers are those who overcome their enemies without strife.”

( *Lao-Tzu : Tao Te Ching.* )

Another great Chinese saint who preached the same gospel of Ahimsa or Nonviolence as Lao-Tzu and of Jen or Love as Confucius and Mencius but in a different way from them all, was Mo-Tzu.

Mo-Tzu lived a little later than Lao-Tzu and Confucius but earlier than Mencius. He was born about 500 B. C. The mode of his life, his ideals and works are very similar to that of the ancient Indian Buddhist Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha and that of Gandhiji. I, therefore, have some

times called Mo-Tzu the ancient Mahatma of China and Gandhiji the modern Mo-Tzu of India. Mencius described him by saying : "If there is benefit for the world, he will do it even by grinding away his body from crown to heel."

Mo-Tzu preached the gospel of nonviolence and opposed war not only by words but also by action. Once when he heard of the news that the Ch'u State was to attack the Sung State, he immediately went from his native State Lu, walked for ten days and ten nights, to see the King of Ch'u and persuaded him to stop the aggression, and he succeeded in his efforts.

According to Mao-Tzu's philosophy, all people should only love one another, should not fight and hurt any body ; this is the will of Heaven. He said :—

"Heaven wishes people to love and benefit each other, and does not want people to hate and hurt each other. Why ? Because He loves all and benefits all."

"How do we know that Heaven loves all and benefits all ? Because He possesses all and feeds all."

"How to follow the will and wish of Heaven ? That is to love all people and Heaven."

( *Works of Mo-Tzu* ).

He thought that Non-Loving is the only cause of chaos and calamities ; and attacking a country and killing people are the greatest sins in the world. Thus he said :—

"How were chaos and calamities caused ? They were caused by people not loving each other. A thief loves his own house and does not love the others, house, he therefore steals the others, house for the

benefit of his own house. A murderer loves his own body and does not love the others, body, he therefore murders the others, body for the benefit of his own body.....Officers, each loves his own family and does not love others' family, they therefore exploit others' families for the benefit of their own families. The state kings, each loves his own country and does not love others' countries they therefore attack others' countries for the benefit of their own countries.....If all look upon others' houses as their own house, who will steal? If all look upon others' body as his own body, who will murder? If all look upon others' family as his own family, who will exploit? If all look upon others' country as his own country, who will attack?.....Therefore, when all love each other, there will be peace; and when all hate each other, there will be chaos and calamity."

( *Works of Mo-Tzu.* )

Again :—

"To kill one man is called wrongful and must receive one death punishment. Accordingly to kill ten men is ten times wrongful and must receive ten death punishments. And to kill hundred men is hundred times wrongful and must receive hundred death punishments.....Now the greatest wrong is to attack a country but receive no punishment..... Is this right?"

( *Works of Mo-Tzu.* )

Again :—

“Which are the greater ones among the evils of the world ? They are those actions of the big countries attacking the small countries, of the big families disturbing the small families ; and those deeds of the strong robbing the weak, of the group of many oppressing the group of few, of the clever deceiving the dull, of the high class scorning the low. These are the greatest evils of the world.”

( *Works of Mao-Tzu.* )

The foregoing paragraphs have dealt at sufficient length with the ideals and messages of the Chinese saints and sages. Now, come to India again.

In India, Mahavira Jaina and Sakyamuni Buddha preached almost the same gospel in the same way. The fundamental principles and teachings of both of them, such as the “Pancha Silani” or the five rules are nearly the same. Those of Buddha are : first, non-killing ; second, non-stealing ; third, non-adultery, fourth, non-lying ; and fifth, non-drinking. And those of Jaina are : first, speaking-the-truth ; second, living-a-pure and poor-life ; third, non-killing ; fourth, non-stealing and fifth, observing-chastity.

The Three Jewels ( Trinatna ) of Jaina, namely : (1) Samyag-Darśana, right conviction, faith and perception combined ; (2) Samyag-Jñāna, right knowledge ; (3) Samyak-Charitra, right conduct ; are all included in the Eightfold Noble Path ( Āryamārga ) of Buddha, namely, (1) Samyag-Dṛṣṭi, right views ; (2) Samyak-samkalpa, right thought ; (3) Samyag-Vac, right speech, (4) Samyak Karmānta, right conduct, (5) Samyag-Ājīva, right livelihood ; (6) Samyag-Vyāyāma, right effort ; (7) Samyak-smṛiti, right remem-

brance and (8) Samyak-Samadhi, right meditation. Both of these sets of items are right ways leading to the same goal, Nirvana.

Besides, both, Mahavira Jaina and Sakyamuni Buddha, believed in the doctrine of Karma and Samsāra. They both denied the omnipotent and omniscient God ; and believed that only one's own zeal and effort could work out one's own salvation.

The similarity between the two religions, Jainism and Buddhism, is so great that some Western savants mistook them for one and the same. The real facts are that from the religious point of view they were indeed very similar to each other, but from the metaphysical point of view they are quite different.

But the most striking feature of the two religions is the same teaching, the same gospel of Ahimsa in both its positive and negative senses ; in its negative sense of "absolute and perfect harmlessness towards all living beings", and its positive sense of "absolute and eternal happiness for all living beings."

As Love is the indissoluble partner of Ahimsa as stated before, Truth is another inseparable companion of Ahimsa. As Gandhiji once said :—

Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentagle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped mettalic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse ?"

( *From Yeravada Mandir, 13.* )

Ahimsa, Love, and Truth are the trinity of One which

we may call the Supreme, or God, or Heaven, or Brahma, or any other name we like. In carrying out their mission this Trinity have again a number of allies or comrades such as Charity, Sacrifice, Selflessness, Fearlessness, Forgiveness etc. Thus Gandhiji said :—

“In its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love, greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.”

( *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* 346. )

“Ahimsa is the extreme limit of forgiveness. But forgiveness is the quality of the brave. Ahimsa is impossible without fearlessness.”

“Let us now examine the root of Ahimsa. It is uttermost selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one's body. If man desired to realise himself i. e. Truth, he could do so only by being completely detached from the body i. e. by making all other beings feel safe from him. That is the way of Ahimsa.”

( *Young India*, 4-11-1926, 348-385. )

Now, what is the truth of Ahimsa ? The truth is this. All living beings in the world have the same life and the same soul. They belong to the same mother, come from the same origin and will return to the same home. It is like a tree of which the stem, branches, leaves, flowers

and fruits all came into being from one and the same root. It is also like an ocean, of which all individual beings are but its separate drops. We therefore belong to all, and all belong to us. Thus the Chinese sages said :—

“Heaven, Earth and I were born at the same time ;  
and all beings are one and the same with me.”

( *Chuan-Tzu : Tsi-Wu Lun.* )

“All things are one” and “Love all beings ;  
Heaven and Earth are one and the same body.”

( *Hui-Tzu : Quoted by Chuan-Tzu.* )

“All things are already complete in me.”

( *Mencius : Books of Mencius.* )

“All people are my brethren and all things are my  
fellows :”

( *Chang-Tsai : Si-Ming.* )

As such, we therefore should love not only all people but all living beings. We must treat all of them as ourselves and must not hurt any of them, causing them pain, following the Golden Rule in the great Epics taught by the ancient Indian sages : “Do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain.” Jesus Christ and Confucius also gave us exactly the same message. Christ Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount : “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even as to them.” Confucius said in answer to a question as to “What is the most simple way one may follow for his whole life time ?” put by his disciple : “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”



Lord Mahavira illustrated this message in an even more lucid way in the following passages :—

“The man also, who still lives in the house, should, in accordance with his creed, be merciful to all living beings ; we are bidden to be fair and equal with all.”

“Towards your fellow-creatures be not hostile ; that is the Law of Him who is rich in control.”

“All beings hate pain : therefore one should not kill them.”

“A man who insults another will long whirl in the cycle of births ; to blame others is not good.”

“A cruel man does cruel acts and is thereby involved in other cruelties but sinful undertaking will in the end bring about misery.”

( *Sutra Kṛtāṅga. S. B. E. Series.* )

“In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others, such injury as would appear undesirable to us, if inflicted upon ourselves.”

( *Yogasāstra* ).

This is the reason why most Hindus, especially the Jainas and the Buddhists, would refrain from taking any flesh for their food. The Jain Sadhus and Sadhwis would even refrain from taking fresh vegetables, because they are living, and to hurt any living thing is in Jainism a deadly sin. They go even so far as to drink only boiled water or even breathe with a cloth across their mouth to avoid insects

and unseen Jivas inhabiting the air. They would also sweep their path lest they may tread on insects. According to them, under the law of Ahimsa, killing of vermin is also forbidden, so that asylums have been established for decrepit animals rather than that they should be put out of their misery by the destruction of life.

People may think that the way which the Jains preach and follow is rather impracticable and therefore unreasonable. This is a wrong notion. It may be impracticable but is not absolutely unreasonable. It is impracticable because humanity has not yet progressed enough. When humanity has sufficiently developed and reached a certain higher stage, this law of Ahimsa should be and would be followed by all.

From what has been said above we can have an outline of the spirit of Ahimsa in Sino-Indian Culture. The facts related and the passages quoted are only those which came readily to my mind and were easily available. Similar facts and passages of the same kind are too numerous in Chinese and Indian literature and scriptures to be quoted in full. It is even difficult to make the best adequate selection of them. These facts and passages were not merely religious ideals or ethical principles but actual and real events in history. Looking over the histories of India and China, from the very beginning to the present day, these two countries have never attacked or invaded any other country, never exploited any other people, though they have often been attacked, invaded and exploited by other warlike peoples. But those who invaded India and China were often assimilated and absorbed by Indian and Chinese cultures, and have enjoyed with the Indian and Chinese people their national wealth and harmony of life.

It has been therefore my firm belief, and also my humble mission, that we Chinese and Indians, the two greatest peoples of the world, should culturally join together and mingle together to create, to establish and promote a common culture, called Sino-Indian Culture, entirely based on Ahimsa. By creating, establishing and promoting this common Sino-Indian Culture, we shall further create, establish and promote a common World Culture on the same basis. By creating, establishing and promoting a common World Culture, we shall create and establish a great union of the World. And by creating and establishing a great Union of the World, we shall lead the world to real and permanent peace, love, harmony and happiness !

TAN YUN-SHAN

Visva-Bharati Cheena-Bhavana,  
Santiniketan, 10-9-49.





# Works By Prof. Tan Yun-Shan

## A. IN CHINESE

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2. On the Indian Ocean ( Poems ) : Canton, China, 1931.
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8. Saint-Philosopher Gandhi : Nanking, China, 1936.
9. Saint-Poet Tagore And the Sino-Japanese War : Chungking, China, 1939.
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## B. IN ENGLISH

1. Cultural Interchange Between India and China ( Pamphlet ) : Santiniketan, India, 1937.
2. Buddhism in China To-day ( Pamphlet ) : Santiniketan, India, 1937
3. What is Chinese Religion ? ( Pamphlet ) : Santiniketan, India, 1937.
4. Modern Chinese History : Andhra University, Waltair India, 1938.
5. India's Contributions to Chinese Culture and Chinese Studies in India, ( Pamphlet ) : Santiniketan, India 1942.
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